

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### REPLY TO "SUPRASPECIFIC NAMES OF MOLLUSCS: A QUANTITATIVE REVIEW"

M. A. Edwards<sup>1</sup> & M. J. Thorne<sup>2</sup>

#### ABSTRACT

The article 'Supraspecific names of Molluscs; a quantitative review' by Phillipe Bouchet and Jean-Pierre Rocroi, contains some misapprehensions about the *Zoological Record*. This article seeks to correct them.

Key words: Literature coverage, Mollusca, Taxonomic names, *Zoological Record*

"Critics will certainly find it easy to discover deficiencies in the volume, but we may doubt whether they will realize the extent of the work involved in it." (Sharp, 1902)

This comment, made by the then editor of the *Zoological Record*, is, apparently, as true today as it was nearly a century ago.

The recent article by Bouchet & Rocroi (1992) discusses the numbers of supraspecific names in Mollusca, and takes the *Zoological Record* to task for what they estimate to be an omission rate of 20% in respect of those names, particularly in the period 1960–1989.

Those responsible for the *Zoological Record* are not averse to criticism, but the Mollusca must be considered in the context of the wide field of literature on all animal groups which the *Record* endeavours to search with the limited resources at its disposal. Although the annual growth in the number of new molluscan names may have remained reasonably stable, the growth in the literature most certainly has not.

Each annual volume of the *Zoological Record* covers the recent literature relating to nearly 50 different animal groups. To locate relevant work, over 6,500 serials are searched, as available, together with some 1,500 or more books and reports; from these, 65–70,000 individual items are indexed each year. In addition, names described in works published in earlier years are constantly com-

ing to light. These are included in that volume of the *Record* being indexed at the time of discovery, which makes an omission rate impossible to define in the long term.

Reference is made to the imperfect coverage of some literature, in particular that from China, Japan and the former Soviet Union. While this is not disputed, it must be appreciated that access to this material is often difficult, and the linguistic skills required to index it are expensive to obtain. Nevertheless, details of additional publications are always welcome. (Of those titles mentioned in the article, the two primary publications are covered in the *Record*, but the Chinese secondary publication is not because abstracts are not normally indexed.)

Each section of the *Zoological Record* carries a request to authors to provide copies of recent publications for indexing purposes, and considerable efforts are made to obtain literature not previously covered.

It is inevitable, however, that workers in a particular field in touch with colleagues will have more complete listings than the *Record*, and no doubt more opportunities to visit libraries abroad, to "browse" through reprint collections, and to check bibliographic compilations which may span many years. To do this on the scale required for all animal groups indexed in the *Record* would be beyond the resources available.

Bouchet & Rocroi also say that the *Record*

<sup>1</sup>The Zoological Society of London, Regent's Park, London NW1 4RY, England.

<sup>2</sup>BIOSIS, U.K., Garforth House, 54 Micklegate, York, North Yorkshire YO1 1LF, England.

is "supposedly the most complete indexing system," "a nomenclator considered to be the most complete . . ." and go on to state that the "unexpectedly high omission rate . . . should cause concern to all taxonomists. Because this nomenclator is the main bibliographical source of many (palaeo) zoologists . . .". They then suggest that names should be registered before they can be declared nomenclaturally available.

The *Record* has never claimed to be complete, that would be impossible, but it is evidently still considered to be "the main bibliographical source" and no other more comprehensive work in the zoological field is known. As regards the registration of names, *Zoological Record* staff are working with the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature to establish such a register, though of course for *Zoological Record* purposes names would still have to be indexed whether or not they were registered.

Compilation and production of the *Zoological Record* is an excessively expensive undertaking. Throughout its long history there have always been appeals for funds but little response from those who, while insisting on its continuation, are unwilling to provide sufficient financial support and rely on the publish-

ers (The Zoological Society and now BIOSIS) to subsidize it.

If the article by Bouchet & Rocroi helps to highlight the difficulties faced by the *Zoological Record* and thereby increases interest in and support for this unique publication, it will have served a useful purpose. Otherwise the biological community should seriously consider what the effects might be should the *Record* cease publication.

#### LITERATURE CITED

- BOUCHET, PHILIPPE & JEAN-PIERRE ROCROI, 1992, Supraspecific names for molluscs: a quantitative review. *Malacologia*, 34:75-86.

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